



Defiant Hearts

Birth and the Prison Industrial Complex

By Adeline Lionheart

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Within miles from birth centers and yoga studios, stand the extreme manifestations of dominance and forced subservience. United States prisons and jails are currently housing more than 170,000 mothers.¹ Approximately 2,000 babies are born to mothers in prison each year.² Behind prison walls, brilliant mothers and mothers-to-be are subdued through capitalist domination, discrimination, humiliation, forced servitude, and conditions utterly non-conducive to human survival – let alone healthy pregnancies – that would induce nightmares and post-traumatic stress within the psyches of any midwife. Since the conception of panopticon societies, pregnant mothers have been tortured, starved, murdered, torn from their child, and outright abused. To be a midwife is not merely to advocate for white women in the leftist co-op scene; a true midwife advocates for birth everywhere, especially where true care is most lacking. A true midwife seeks the absolute annihilation of all forms of anti-life* that restrict the beautiful act of birth.

BIRTH, FAMILIES, AND INCARCERATION

The act of giving birth in correctional facilities has been wielded against women as a torturous weapon, a callous process that ignores the seething pain a neglected pregnancy can inflict upon an incarcerated individual. In 2003, a report by the United States Department of Justice indicated that 6% of women entering local jails and 5% of women entering state prisons were pregnant.³ Unfortunately, women don't merely enter prison pregnant – some become pregnant after they are raped by guards.⁴ This begs the question: why haven't more guards been put in prison themselves – or in front of revolutionary firing squads – for committing such heinous acts? The answer is simple: in civilized societies, violence flows downward. Guards can threaten inmates with restricted privileges, criminal charges (falsely accusing a corrections officer), and much depreciated conditions if they dare file grievances against them. When prisoners do charge guards with sexual harassment or rape, the guards are generally transferred to other prisons, receive low-level consequences for their actions, or, most likely, no consequences at all.⁵ Such a hierarchy has led to an undocumented number of unwanted pregnancies and extreme psychological trauma for some victims of the prison industrial complex.

Regardless of how one finds themselves pregnant and in prison, the conditions for mothers are grueling at best. A survey of women's prisons found that fewer than half provided pre-natal care, only 15% provided special diets or nutritional programs for pregnant prisoners, and only 11% provided postpartum counseling.⁶ Most women are denied access to maternal clothing,

*As it is used in this particular writing, "anti-life" is used to describe systems, tendencies, institutions, dynamics, and relations that work to extinguish life and reduce people to mere capital. The term "anti-life" is not to be confused with "anti-birth" or "anti-abortion."

regular visits to doctors, or most things vital to a healthy pregnancy. Instead, mothers are often required to wear belly chains when being transferred to and from the hospital, and they wait weeks for simple check-ups. In a recent case of extreme neglect, pregnant inmate Shakira Staten was forced to give birth to her child alone in her cell, accompanied only by the echoes of her cries for help and a nurse's lifeless explanation that she was being barred from transportation to a hospital because the prison warden claimed she was "faking her labor." Shakira stated, "Animals are treated better than I was."⁷

Possibly one of the most disgusting practices prisons utilize during a mother's pregnancy is shackling. It is common practice for women to have their legs and arms shackled to a hospital bed while giving birth. This year the American Medical Association adopted a resolution to prohibit the shackling of women during labor, calling the practice "barbaric" and "medically hazardous,"⁸ yet, in the US alone, 40 states still legally allow and practice shackling during labor.⁹ As a teaspoon of common sense would reveal, this makes it nearly impossible for women to participate in their labor in the ways their body would instinctively do so if they were given the dignity to labor freely.

Postpartum women are commonly denied pain medication and antibiotics, particularly worrisome in regards to women who have had cesarean section operations.¹⁰ The most basic of medical care is often absent for pregnant women in prisons. In one instance, a five-month-pregnant woman was experiencing episodes of vaginal bleeding, abdominal cramps, and severe pain. Over the course of a three-week period she requested medical assistance, but there was no obstetrician on contract with the prison. She was finally seen by a chief medical officer, an orthopedist. The orthopedist prescribed her Flagyl without examining her physically or running any laboratory tests. She went into labor the next day and birthed a son who lived only two hours before dying in her arms.¹¹

Another mother, a California Valley State prisoner, was in prison for violating her probation by saying "Fuck you" to a case worker in a drug treatment program. Desperate to get into California's Community Prisoner Mother Program, where children can stay with their mothers for up to six years in a residential facility, she was informed that she would first have to have an oral exam to prove that she had no dental problems, not even a cavity (this ridiculous requirement exists as a filtering mechanism, simply because there are so many women who qualify for the program). In a cruel paradox, dental care is not provided to applicants to the program, except for extractions. This mother had dental problems, dental problems that could have been solved with cleanings and fillings. But instead, she had to have 15 teeth extracted. She had no other choice if she wanted to keep her baby.¹²

FOOTNOTES

1. There are approximately 200,000 women currently incarcerated (www.wpaonline.org). 85% of incarcerated women are mothers (<http://www.theprisonbirthproject.org/>). 85% of 200,000 is 170,000.
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14. Haddock, Vicki, "Babies Behind Bars," http://articles.sfgate.com/2006-05-14/opinion/17295101_1_prison-cell-women-prisoners-female-inmates, (May 2006).
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“When you’re a mother, the first place you want to be is with your baby, and the last place you want to be is in prison.”

- Juanita Massie (a mother at a California State Prison)

Postpartum, incarcerated mothers endure intense psychological disconnect from their children. Mothers rarely get to keep their babies for more than a day or two before they are swept away to foster homes, agencies, or institutions. If mothers eventually get out on parole, they’ll be lucky if their child even recognizes them. Because those on the inside are considered “unfit mothers,” the process of reacquiring their child is ridiculously challenging. Under the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, if an incarcerated parent does not have contact with their child for six months, they can be charged with “abandonment” and have their parental rights terminated. The Act also obligates foster care organizations to move to terminate parental rights if a child is in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months.¹³ Being an incarcerated parent proves to be an entirely different monster of its own. Children of incarcerated mothers are shipped off to places mothers are entirely unaware of, and legal assistance is relatively non-existent. This all but guarantees that mothers will lose their children unless they work extremely hard to fight the system, and even then, the most valiant of efforts may not be enough.

Certain prisons in select states have created “nurseries.” Usually, nurseries are constructed from the skeletons of unused sections of correctional facilities. Qualifying inmates – those set to go on parole within the next few years and deemed no risk to children – share space with their newborns and participate in parenting classes and “rehabilitation”.¹⁴ Other programs, like the Community Prisoner Mother Program with two locations in California, allows select children to join their mothers in their incarceration at special facilities for up to six years. There are currently nine prison nursery programs that allow women to keep their infants with them inside a correctional facility after the baby’s birth. Only one jail in the nation (Rikers Island) has a nursery.¹⁵ Nurseries have received great acclaim from a wide spectrum of individuals, from prisoner advocacy groups to prison wardens. Chandra Villanueva, Policy Associate at Women’s Prison Association commented, “Prison nursery programs keep mothers and infants together during the critical first months of infant development, and the research shows that these programs produce lower rates of recidivism among participating mothers. As we recognize the benefits of prison nursery programs, we must also increase our investment in community-based alternatives, which allow for maternal/child bonding and enable women to address the issues that brought them into the criminal justice system in the first place.”¹⁶ Surprisingly, righteous and self-satisfied prison

warden Dawn Davison stated, “I saw what was happening to my women, and how they longed for their babies. I’m a mother. And as a mother it broke my heart. I thought, what would happen if that bond between mother and baby didn’t have to be broken?”¹⁴ Tall words for the slave driver of thousands.

If only for a moment, let’s point out the absurdity: babies in jail. Despite the obvious gains that mothers experience through these institutions within institutions, the damage that these facilities could inflict on children are endless, yet, hardly documented. Babies’ brains are like sponges; children learn more between the tender ages of 0-5 than they do throughout the entirety of their adult lives.¹⁷ This is why it is often suggested to play Beethoven and Mozart to infants, expose them to various thought-provoking situations, and engage them with different environments as a child. It seems apparent that if one were to put a baby on concrete, in the illumination of a florescent light, and near the power dynamics of a correctional officer, they would certainly not absorb anything from life worth retaining. Instead, the child may learn to control women or be controlled by men in the ways that they have witnessed.

Denise Johnson, an advocate for California’s prison nurseries, stated, “In the first year of life, the babies don’t know that they are technically in a prison. What they do perceive is that they are in their mothers’ arms.”¹⁴ It is insane to view these nurseries as anything more than a concession by prison wardens made in order to distract the public’s lazy eye. In the end, nurseries may help women be closer to their babies for a period of time, but if the best solution people have implemented thus far is sentencing infants to do time with their mothers, we may be in a hell of a lot more trouble than we initially thought.

Right now the system works to break families apart. More than half of female prisoners never receive visits from their children, because they’re located in remote parts of the state often hundreds of miles away.

-Barbara Bloom (Sonoma State criminal justice professor)

Distance puts stress on any relationship, but prisons bring in a whole new element to long-distance relationships. In 2000, more than 60% of incarcerated mothers were housed more than 100 miles from their child’s home and less than 9% were within 20 miles of their child.¹⁸ For those who are too poor to afford a car, bus fare, taxis, or the gas it takes to continually drive back and forth to the prison, this distance functions as a serious barrier to staying connected to their loved ones. What child under age 18 has the ability or monetary support to transport themselves 20-100 miles from home? Those who have built prisons have never been ignorant. Make no mistake,

Recommended Reading

Locked Up by Alfredo Bonanno

Caliban and the Witch by Silvia Federici

Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: The History of Women Healers

by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English

We Are An Image From the Future

by A.G. Schwarz, Void Network, and Tasos Sagris

LINKS

www.birthattendants.com

www.theprisonbirthproject.org

www.peacetreenc.org

www.fullspectrumdouglas.org

http://www.essence.com/news/hot_topics_4/commentary_wardens_perspective.php

(Trigger warning: the video posted on this site is appalling. It is, however, an excellent illustration of the denial and insanity that advocates of prison nurseries and recidivism philosophies hold.)

Arms in Seattle, Washington, are providing culturally competent, free doulas to women who cannot afford one.

Across the country, people are deciding to step up and serve as doulas for women in their communities, instead of allowing the professionalization of the doula to result in the commodification of love and support, and the outsourcing of this role to “professionals.” Across the country, midwives are thinking critically about licensure and considering the implications that state-regulated midwifery will have on their practice. Some midwives are choosing to become licensed so that they can offer services to families receiving state medical insurance. Others are choosing to forgo a license so that they can remain accessible to families without citizenship status or to families who wish to have home births for their breech, VBAC, or twin babies. Midwives across the country are assisting people, not just during the process of labor, but in the process of empowerment and reclaiming autonomy. Families are rediscovering that they have right and the ability to wisely choose the best way to birth their babies.

There is an infinite number of trajectories you can choose - the important part is that you start now. World round, women are being robbed of their own experiences and stuffed into isolation, raped by correctional officers, chained to hospital beds during labor; all of this while the world land base and its people are being mercilessly destroyed by the predatory instinct of the civilized. There is no excuse for waiting. Pregnant mothers in prison won't wait to have their babies while you fail to make amends. Start from where you stand; grab your endless possibilities by the throat and never look back!

prisons are extremely intentional about dividing families.

The impact on children who lose their parents to prison is astronomical, and given the fact that 85% of women in prison are mothers,¹⁹ this damage is massive and far-reaching. A recent study reported that, “The impact of parental imprisonment on children can be profound and long-lasting. Often children of prisoners are discriminated against and stigmatized as a result of parental imprisonment and have suffered from trauma, fear, shame, guilt and low self-esteem.” The study continues, “Relationships with other family members frequently suffer. Some children become withdrawn, are affected by ‘increased health problems and regressive behavior such as bed-wetting’, suffer worsening performance and attendance rates at school or display increased aggression, antisocial or criminal tendencies.”²⁰ Not only does the imprisonment of a parent affect those incarcerated, but it nearly destroys what semblance of a healthy life the child may once have had. As a matter of fact, it actually increases a child's likelihood of ending up in prison themselves.²¹ This situation functions as a vicious cycle, trapping generation after generation within the confines of penitentiaries.

DEATH INCARNATE

May clarity prevail: prisons are death incarnate; from the very core they are rotten, like a fruit that begs to be torn from its tree of genesis. “Correctional facilities” are designed to break the human spirit and re-educate those within its walls to be “model citizens” – snitches, police, obedient workers, and other variations of cowardly traits – or, insert those who will not be tamed into the osculating door of probation violations and lengthy prison sentences, subsequently converting their lives into capital. At its basics, this process is the conversion of life to death (capital).

This process is necessary to the functioning of capitalism. The only uniqueness the prison industrial complex holds is in aesthetics. The same dynamics established by the prison industrial complex are applied and harnessed against old growth forests that are flattened into wastelands for profit margins; against the dolphin and sea turtle population of the Gulf Coast when an exploded oil pipeline leaked 49,000,000 gallons of oil into the pacific ocean. Prisons, as should be well-demonstrated throughout this article, do not consider the lives of children of incarcerated mothers to be a worthy investment. This dehumanization and utter attack on relationships has been taking place within capitalism for centuries. Prison's essential function within this framework is to make the capitalist death drive run as efficiently as possible by recuperating its opponents into raw capital. Therefore, prisons should not be viewed as an “issue” that has cosmetic flaws and needs only to be addressed through reform, but rather a piece of an overarching system that

works to choke out all of our lives and will stop at nothing to do so.

RECIDIVISM, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR, AND THE CRIMINAL

Fact: The United States has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world²² and, currently, there are over 2.3 million people in the clutches of United States prisons and jails.²³ If one were to extend those figures to probation or parole, 7.3 million people in the United States are ensnared in the judicial/penal system.²⁴ That's 1 in every 31 adults.²⁵ Of those incarcerated, between 53%-88% are non-violent offenders.²⁶ Most of these "offenders" are of African, Hispanic, Indian, Arab, or non-Caucasian decent. Although blacks account for only 12% of the United States population, they make up 44% of those currently incarcerated. While 1.3% of white males between the ages of 25 and 29 are in prison, 10.4% of black males within the same demographic are in prison.²⁷ The disproportionate number of prisoners of color indicates that the penal system focuses the bulk of its wrath on a poor, non-white population. These statistics are a direct result of racism, no matter how you slice it.

Criminality is not an individual quality people possess, it is a label "the civilized" (read: rich and powerful) use to discredit those who possess qualities that threaten the "civilized" system. There is absolutely nothing innately criminal about crossing a road – it only becomes a criminal act when a government declares it "j-walking." The same can be said for midwives. The act of a midwife assisting a birth is not illegal. It only becomes illegal when midwifery threatens/destabilizes capital or state control and a governing body makes home birth or midwifery a crime punishable by law. Crimes are created by those who sit upon islands of wealth and power. Those in power are in desperate need of protection; the rich and powerful make laws in an attempt to suppress the riotous poor and keep their flows of money uninterrupted. It has been this way since the emergence of capitalism.²⁸

To the detriment of most, there are those in this world that live and breathe the concept of recidivism. Recidivism is an ideology held by judges, police, jail guards, and those with treacherous hearts who believe that the best way to "solve" criminality is to lower the level of recidivism (meaning the frequency with which people return to prison after having been released from prison for similar crimes). This strategy doesn't take into account a variety of factors, such as economic conditions, potential addictions, and prejudice. The philosophy of recidivism does not provide the victims of the prison industrial complex with any resources to meet their immediate needs; it does not address racism, classism, or other barriers to one's ability to obtain or maintain a healthy lifestyle; it does not address how capitalism needs these people to fail in order for the economic system to continue the way it does; it only blames people

wins are what we gouge-out, define, and create for ourselves, not what we look to the State to approve.

Strategically speaking, if midwives wish to see their practices spread like wildfire, they need to possess a thorough understanding of how the world works. They need to understand that the barriers that restrict positive birth culture from being accessible to everyone is rooted in the same colonialism that bankrupted the indigenous and robbed them of the practices they have depended on for thousands of years; it is rooted in male domination that seeks to obtain total tutelage over women's bodies; it is rooted in our complicity, and it is rooted in every aspect of civilized society. If midwives and parents are to ever reach a point in which they are free to practice unrestricted birth, it is necessary to destroy capitalism, civilization, and all of the constraints it places between parents and their baby. They must lay waste to the mainstream birth culture, not just create an alternative to it. They need to destroy the oppressive focus the mainstream midwifery has on the "wealthy green mama" demographic. Midwives of the world, you know your services are beyond valuable and integral – you need only to offer yourself to everyone. Birth is everywhere; midwifery needs to be viral and fierce.

MIDWIVES: GET OFF THE FENCE!

Your skills well-refined, your art perfected, there is a laundry list of conditions to destroy and millions of people who need your help. Get going! There is no better time than now and no one more qualified to offer the world positive birth culture. Midwives, doulas, and birth advocates: now is the time to sharpen your blades and go to war with a culture that would seek to destroy our ability to deliver our own babies or define ways we value birth. The time has come to, once again, make birth a threat!

Work is being done around the country to address the needs of birthing people outside of the "wealthy green mama" parameters of liberal activism's outreach. The Birth Attendants, based out of Olympia, Washington, is a grass roots collective providing informational, physical, and emotional resources to incarcerated women and mothers to enhance and extend their reproductive choices. They organize birth classes in the local jails and offer doula support to laboring women. The Peace Tree Prison Doulas are a group of volunteer doulas in North Carolina that facilitate pregnancy, labor, and postpartum discussion groups, as well as provide continuous birth doula support for incarcerated women. They also provide continuous postpartum counseling and breastfeeding support. The Prison Birth Project in Massachusetts is doing similar, amazing work. The Full Spectrum Doula Network is just starting to organize radical doulas and make the services of radical doulas better known and more accessible. Organizations like Open

bubble. The next time you hear your neighbor being beaten by their abusive partner, get them out of the situation and offer them your assistance; the next time the pigs raid your neighbors' house, approach them afterwards with legal support and creative forms of solidarity; the next time someone in your neighborhood is outed as a rapist, run that fucker out of town. The key is establishing self-reliable connections that don't depend of the state apparatus to resolve our conflicts.

These strategies point to the following: get connected, express solidarity, take offensive stances that accept no compromise, and opt out of the game the judicial system has created and wants us to play in order to obtain immediate goals; reject their mediation. While we may find ourselves at the epicenter of the largest empire the world has ever known, we can still pose a serious threat to our enemies and, one day, possibly bring their reign to a screeching halt.

IT'S BIGGER THAN BIRTH; IT'S BIGGER THAN PRISON

The prison industrial complex is just one piece of the current conditions that all but a few midwives and birth activists have ignored. It isn't just about prison, and it isn't just about birth; there is an entire apparatus with intricate power dynamics that has created the hospitals, insurance companies, prisons, and patriarchy that we are oppressed by today. The medical industry has been profiting off of women's bodies for centuries. The same can be said for prisons. Controlling bodies is a key function of capitalism. Hospitals' interventions in healthy births, just like prison policies, reduce people to capital that can be managed and manipulated to ensure capitalist stability.

If one strives to be a holistic midwife, it seems fairly obvious that it would be entirely ineffective to divorce oneself from the rest of the somber state in which we find birth today. To do so would be simply naive. Midwives need to study the history of midwifery and the parallel histories of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. The witch burnings of the 16th and 17th centuries, the racist campaign to eliminate the midwives in this country in the early part of the 1900's - this history should illustrate that to simply appeal to the state for recognition and validation of midwifery services is to hand over more of their power, power that the State can then strip from us at any time. Midwives' strategies need to take a multi-faceted, intelligent, and hostile approach to their dealings with the State. Keeping the power and the wisdom of birth with women should always be the priority. When midwives concede to legislation that prohibits women from letting their bodies simply do what they know how to do - whether it be birth twins or birth post-dates - midwives sign away other people's rights to their own bodily processes. Midwives who are choosing to fight through the avenues of the legal system need to understand that "wins" in that system are in no way guarantees, and that the only true

for repeating old behaviors when they return to a world on the outside that is even more harsh. Those who preach this pompous ideology are cowards and should have every word uttered from their mouths dismissed as indiscernible garbage.

Criminality and anti-social behavior is a response to toxic, impoverished living conditions, an inability to meet one's basic needs, or, in unique incidents, a calculated effort to undermine capital. Those in power have always demonized criminals and anti-capitalists; they do this because they fear that those they dominate may one day begin to see revolt as a viable option. If the servants of the state found the state's laws to be irrelevant, the state would lose their stranglehold on us. If it were to become a common knowledge that criminality (squatting abandoned houses, looting business districts, driving the final nail into logging and construction companies that gnaw at its sustainable yield, underground births, etc.) could meet peoples' needs and provide them with some relief to their current ailments, there would be mass upheaval. This is the true reason that criminality exists: the sheer bourgeois terror of potential proletarian revenge and revolt.

We need to support those practicing independent and underground midwifery, for they, too, are criminalized by a system that this is obviously threatened by the idea of strong, self-reliant communities, empowered women, and autonomous families. We need to shift our view of criminality to an understanding of it as an external label crafted by the state to distract us from our own power and to punish us for our behaviors that threaten civilization and capitalism. We need to get in touch with our inner criminal to break free from our confines.

For those of you who view the eradication of criminal parameters as a development; you are in great company with the lion's share of the world. For those of you who find yourself resenting these words and this worldview; hide down your holes - your stability is likely to fade fast.

SOFTER BLANKETS; SUSTAINABLE CAGES

Some would argue that prisons are necessary and fill an important roll in civilized society, that they are meant to correct dangerous behaviors. From this footing emerges reform: the idea that there are just a few bad eggs in "correctional facilities," and that if we put enough energy and faith into all available legal avenues to obtain bigger housing units, maternal clothing, softer blankets, better food, and better legal representation, then the malicious realities of prisons will simply be remedied. This belief is delusional. By appeasing the prison reform activists with meager concessions, prison wardens succeed in pacifying resistance before it even acquires its baby teeth. No amount of reform will change the fact that mothers are giving birth

to children in captivity, nor will it change the unequal relationship between the state and those who live under its might. There should be no relationship with prisons or the state but one of all-out hostility. Prison reform activists have asked us for decades to wait patiently for the next appeal, law, or picket, and to do anything but unleash the physical manifestations of our frustrations against those who enslave and murder our mothers. By now it should be crystal clear that the reformists have not only failed us, but have become our enemies who wish to tame our desires.

This is not to say that mothers receiving better nutrition, more comfortable living quarters, or the banning of shackling during labor doesn't help; prisoners need all the help they can get. But, bigger cages that are publicly acceptable is not a victory. Instead, we should be looking through a different lens at these gains. Knowing that prison's primary purpose is to subdue uncontrollable populations and produce cheap labor for corporations²⁹, these gains should be welcomed only if we simultaneously reiterate to those handing out concessions that this is not enough; we will not stop until our mothers are removed from their cages and the emptied cells reduced to ashes.

TAKE NO PRISONERS : ABOLITIONIST PRISON STRATEGIES

So you think you've got it sewn up tight? Well, you've got us up against the ropes tonight. But when the smoke clears, you'll be drawing flies, and we'll be dancing on your grave, fire in our eyes.

-Paint It Black

In a world where millions are sent to death camps and the only solutions that most people on the outside propose are modifications to these death camps, what are those of us who still possess our hearts and spines to do? We draw lines in the sand and trim the fat; we begin to treat the prison industrial complex, its sympathizers, and those who enable it, as our sworn enemies. From that position, we begin to network and befriend those our enemies wish to destroy - prisoners, criminals, etc. – and collectively create an uncompromising force to be reckoned with. And then we don't relent until prisons – and civilization itself – is brought to its knees begging for mercy.

In Greece, through consistent prisoner solidarity, networking, and rioting for those incarcerated, anarchists and incarcerated populations developed enough influence and cohesiveness to coordinate a massive hunger strike – in which 5,600 people participated³⁰ – that led to the release of 5,500 people.³¹ While this hunger strike was being staged, anarchists on the outside launched multiple attacks against capital and law enforcement. Police asylums (zones where police may not enter) have been established at every college campus;

opaque and autonomous neighborhoods have been defended for years – a huge victory. There are many things that remain applicable from this model for us in the United States. One, networking and building cohesiveness with prisoners is entirely possible here and would much benefit us. Two, compromise leads us only to disappointment, and therefore, it only makes sense for us to fight tireless, uncompromising battles against the state and its minions. Three, prisoners already hate prison and police, and have in one way or another, developed some sort of anti-establishment sentiments. In that sense, they are our allies with just as much strength to offer us as we have to offer them. Four, rather than fighting battles we cannot win, we should divert our energy to put pressure on crisis points. The prison rebellion in Greece is one that has, so far, been a great success with immediate and impressive results, and one in which we can surely learn from.

In the United States, there have been reports of “noise demonstrations,” in which those on the outside have communicated with prisoners through noisy displays right outside their cell windows. Oftentimes, in excitement that somebody, somewhere cares about their situations, prisoners start beating on their prison windows to communicate back with those on the outside. While tame compared to the strategies we hear of across the Atlantic, these noise demonstrations are a step in the right direction. By focusing on supporting those who sincerely hate police, prisons, and the captors of this world, anarchists gain strength in ways we never could have imagined; we begin to explore common hatreds outside of our comfort bubbles.

There are prisoners other than “political prisoners” and, lately, radicals in the United States have acknowledged that. While it is essential that we support those specifically targeted for their defiant politics, it is equally important that we support prison rebels and the common criminal. Different individuals and collectives throughout the country have started to extend their prisoner letter writing nights to queer and transgender prisoners, as well as those targeted as leaders of prison riots. Like noise demonstrations, this is a good means of opening lines of communication to those who resent this society the most. This way, we are able to establish actual friendships and connections with those on the inside and, subsequently, spiderweb our collective power.

Prisons are an outgrowth of colonial, capitalist culture. There is a tremendous amount of work being done around the world to address conflict in non-punitive ways, ways that work towards the creation of healthier communities, communities to strengthen in order to fight our enemies. Open your minds to see people, not just criminals, and to see the potential for healthy relations aimed at a common enemy to form instead of a judicial system that simply perpetuates and reinforces systemic oppression. This means, escape your